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ABSTRACT

Albuquerque Technical Vocational Institute, in New Mexico, implemented a project to enable liberal arts and vocational education faculty to share information and develop materials to help create a more cohesive curriculum for students. The project lasted two terms and sought specifically to enhance general education curricula with examples from vocational courses and the workplace; enhance career education with examples from the Arts and Science (A&S) curricula; increase communication among departmental faculty, employers, and advisory boards; and improve vocational students' attitudes towards required courses by illustrating career applications of educational content. Accomplishments of the project include the development and revision of course and instructional materials, the development of sample packets and lectures from employers and different professions, and increased communication between departments. Problems encountered in implementing the program include the absence of adequate evaluation methods, the need for team leader training, a lack of secretarial support, and the absence of an optional second year to allow departmental teams to continue. Participants highlighted the following as positive elements that should be replicated in future projects: (1) the team structure and the existence of lead A&S faculty; (2) bimonthly team leader meetings; (3) the ability of faculty to choose projects; (4) clearly stated expected results; (5) course release and hourly pay; and (6) positive attitudes and communication. (TGI)

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# *LIBERAL ARTS VS. VOCATIONAL EDUCATION: AN OLYMPIAN BALANCING ACT*

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## Biography

**Geraldine L. McBroom** has been Assistant Dean of Arts and Sciences at Albuquerque Technical-Vocational Institute (TVI) for four years. She came to this position after twenty years of teaching English at secondary, undergraduate, and graduate levels and being Acting Director of Freshman English at the University of New Mexico. Her M.A. from Kent State University is in English and her Ph. D. is in Humanities Education.

As a faculty member when TVI's Department of Arts and Sciences (A & S) was created, Gerry recognized the need for better communication between A & S and the vocational departments to create a more cohesive curriculum for students as well as to eliminate some faculty members' biases and preconceived notions. As an administrator, Gerry sought ways to encourage these goals through interdepartmental teams funded by a Carl Perkins grant.

In addition to her administrative duties working with 85 full-time and 170 part-time faculty members, Gerry is a facilitator for Strengthening Quality in Schools, a state-wide project involving elementary through secondary schools. She is also a Continuous Quality Improvement trainer, serves on the CQI Steering Team, and facilitates a variety of departmental and institutional committees.

## Liberal Arts vs. Vocational Education: An Olympian Balancing Act

At many community colleges, huge obstacles exist in the working relationships between the liberal education side of the house and the vocational/technical side. The SCANS report and *A Nation at Risk* indicate both kinds of education are needed for students to do well in their chosen careers. However, many liberal arts courses focus on theory with limited references to practical applications while vocational courses which focus on applications may not tie these to a theoretical framework. Students are aware of this dichotomy and often perceive their required vocational and general education courses as being at cross purposes. Because of these differences--either real or perceived, administrators need to offer opportunities for faculty to understand each other's programs and to create a more cohesive curriculum for students. One such project at Albuquerque Technical-Vocational Institute (TVI) brought together eighty team members from five departments: Arts and Sciences, Technologies, Business Occupations, Health Occupations, and Trades and Service Occupations. Faculties shared information and produced materials to connect theory and practice.

### ♦ PROJECT BACKGROUND

TVI, which began in 1964 as a vocational school to provide adults with skills necessary for success in the world of work, was given associate degree granting authority in 1986. This added the Department of Arts and Sciences (A & S) to a well-established, well-respected institution of one developmental education and four vocational departments. A & S began by offering 53 sections in fall 1986; within five years A & S was offering close to 40% of TVI's total course sections. The other departments were growing as well by adding associate degree programs but not at the rate of A & S. Different funding formulas which were not always understood by the members of vocational departments were applied. Although the vocational departments were not denied funding, A & S was receiving a large portion of the budget. Additionally, with the state mandate, vocational faculty members were required to have bachelors' degrees. Even though this was not a requirement A & S instituted, the hostility was directed toward A & S and its faculty.

By 1993, twelve certificate and twenty-two associate degree programs required A & S course work for their completion. The vocational faculty added the A & S courses that seemed to fit their programs, but they did not fully understand the content being presented. Likewise, the A & S faculty, who knew their subject areas and how to relate these to traditional transfer students, did not fully understand how to relate this subject matter to the variety of vocational majors in their courses. Instructors teaching fifteen credit hours three terms a year seldom had time, even if they had the inclination, to meet with their colleagues in other departments.

## ♦ PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The project began with a proposal from the Assistant Dean of Arts and Sciences to the Institution's Carl Perkins Committee. Some of the proposed goals were as follows:

- to enhance TVI's general education (A & S) curricula with examples from vocational courses, career courses, and the work place
- to enhance career education courses with examples from A & S curricula
- to increase communication among TVI departmental faculties, employers, and advisory boards
- to improve vocational students' attitudes about required courses by presenting career applications of educational content and increase awareness of majors and career choices for nondegree students.

In the proposal, integration team members were described by disciplines, but specific team members and projects were not identified. The departmental deans agreed to grant either release time or additional compensation for the project.

Interested A & S faculty members were asked to prepare miniproposals outlining their particular concerns within the framework of the integration teams listed in the Perkins proposal. This required an investigation of the vocational majors in their courses and a general focus for either a one- or two-term project. As project coordinator, the Assistant Dean of A & S worked with the deans of other departments, identifying the faculty who might want to work on these projects. Then the A & S faculty communicated with colleagues in other departments to discuss general ideas and generate narrowed projects, contacts few had made before.

## ♦ PROJECT TEAMS AND OUTCOMES

The following gives some of the disciplines and programs involved in the Integration Teams and their accomplishments. (A complete listing is available.)

- **Psychology, Nursing, Child Development, Practical Nursing:** Prepared supplemental materials from health care professions for use in General and Developmental Psychology.

- **Intermediate and College Algebra, Electronics Technology, Instrumentation & Control, Respiratory Therapy Technology, Accounting:** Furthered algebra reform through compilation of materials from all departments.

- **Logic/Critical Thinking, Business Ethics, Criminal Justice, Business Administration, Legal Assistant, Architectural/Engineering Drafting, Computer Programming:** Met with other departments in an attempt to coordinate lectures, share materials, etc. Made video tapes for use in philosophy and business classes. Collected material appropriate to a variety of majors for use in philosophy courses.

- **Interpersonal Communication, Legal Assistant , Court Reporting, Administrative Assistant, Practical Nursing, Court Reporting:** Developed instructor packets containing applications from six majors, lists of communication skills needed for these majors, bibliographies, and career-specific assignments.

- **Microbiology, Nursing, Medical Laboratory Technician, Respiratory Therapy:** Assembled examples from health care professions for use in microbiology lectures.

- **Sociology, Criminal Justice:** Read criminal justice texts and articles; applied sociological theory to them for student and faculty use.

- **Technical Writing, Machine Tool Technology, Criminal Justice, Environmental Protection Technology, Court Reporting, Business Computer Programming, Fire Science:** Created sample packets of workplace writing examples from employers, faculties of Trades and Business Occupations, and advisory board members.

- **Computer Science, Legal Assistant, Business Computer Programming Technology, Manufacturing Specialist, Business Administration:** Generated materials that help students in Business Occupations and Technologies take advantage of computer resources and studied how these materials could be integrated into related courses in A & S, Business Occupations, and Technologies.

- **Composition, Nursing, Child Development, Administrative Assistant:** Analyzed program and course requirements, syllabi, student profiles and needs of certain programs requiring English 101. Child Development changed its degree program to require English 101 before its core courses.

♦ **REPLICATING THE PROJECT**

If we were to do this projects again, we would do a few things differently:

1. EVALUATION: Evaluation was by far the weakest part of the design. Student surveys comparing students in the target classes which integrated vocational examples and those which did not should have been administered. Although end-of-term surveys indicated satisfaction with the course, no comparative assessment tool was administered. Additionally, attitudinal surveys of the faculty would have given quantitative data about perceptions and subsequent changes.

2. TEAM LEADER TRAINING: Even though the A & S team leaders talked about the problems they would face going into "hostile territory," the team leaders agreed that they needed training in group dynamics, group communication, and how to be a better team leader.

3. SECRETARIAL SUPPORT: Because the faculty members have no secretarial support for their classes, this project created an added burden. The faculty thought they might have created more materials if they had been given help with the tasks of typing, collating, copying, and distributing.

4. OPTIONAL SECOND YEAR: Because the project lasted only two terms, some of the team members thought they would have liked the option of continuing as a departmental team, rather than as individuals, as they extended training to other faculty on the use of the materials produced. They liked the structure of the project and did not feel they were as successful working on their own the next year.

The participants thought the following should be replicated in future projects:

1. TEAM STRUCTURE WITH LEAD FACULTY: Having A & S faculty members lead the teams seems to have worked well. Because A & S members approached the vocational department members with general ideas about projects which would enhance the general education courses rather than changing the vocational curricula, the faculty members received positive reactions for the most part. The perception of "ivory-towered intellectuals" seemed to change as the vocational faculty interacted with A & S colleagues who were willing to listen and learn.

2. TEAM LEADER MEETINGS: The A & S faculty leaders met bimonthly to talk about the projects, their groups' interactions, problems, suggestions. They were able to help each other overcome obstacles and head off potential difficulties. As the second term got underway, they helped each other form new teams if the project had changed.

3. CHOICES OF PROJECT/FLEXIBILITY: Rather than being told what to do, the team leaders were able to identify their own needs. Knowing they could change directions if they needed to or wanted to created more of a buy-in on their parts and generated more enthusiasm for the work. If some faculty members were less committed than others, that was recognized, but the project moved on.

4. BROAD, STATED EXPECTATIONS: Even though the participants could determine their own projects, the project director gave general parameters of the expected results. The teams had to have concrete outcomes, what came to be called "stuff." The "stuff" of each team was different, but it could not be just talking and getting to know others. Each team leader met with the project director after meeting with the other team members to establish exactly what the team would develop. Only one caution was given: each team should not create a separate course for every major at TVI. The point was integration, not course proliferation.

5. COURSE RELEASE/HOURLY PAY: The team members were also allowed to choose if they wanted one or two course releases or hourly compensation. In this way, the participants could determine how much time they wanted to put into the project. Participants agreed that, without the release or compensation, the results would not have been the same. In fact, most said they would not even have begun the task.

6. ATTITUDES/COMMUNICATION: Acknowledging that many vocational faculty did not have a positive opinion of A & S but going into the project with positive outlooks themselves, the team leaders were able to develop good relationships with the members from the vocational departments. The power of social events, thank-you notes, quickly returned phone messages, and--most important--going to the vocational departments' locations for meetings soon became evident. Valuing different styles and backgrounds of all team members and trying to capitalize on these was a key contributor to success.

## ♦ CONCLUSION

No single project can eliminate the paradigms developed over years, but this project made a contribution with activities which continue today. In addition to the concrete results of these projects, faculty members opened lines of communication that had not existed before. Many Arts and Sciences' faculty members are invited to participate in vocational advisory boards. Some have visited the work places of graduates, met employers, and attended clinicals with vocational faculty members. The math integration team has continued to revise courses and currently has combined with technical writing and computer science to develop a course which integrates mathematics, computer literacy, and writing. When the Technologies Department began building their SunRayce car entry, they invited technical writing, physics, and math instructors to join them and their students in the project. The computer group whose work became the basis for an institute-wide computer literacy requirement is now working with the faculty in the Department of Developmental Studies to use the Internet and computer programs to create classroom materials and courses on-line. A speakers' bureau has been compiled; it lists local employers who are willing to speak to students about why general education courses are important to career success. The Communication Studies' faculty has been asked to present workshops on organizing collaborative projects and work groups to vocational department faculties.

Students are the major recipients of the curricular modifications accomplished by the project participants. More of students' required courses integrate examples from the workplace, incorporate contextual learning situations, and offer relevant connections to vocational majors. Vocational majors are being shown the connections between their vocational and general education classes, and nondegree and transfer students are exposed to career options as they study theory.

TVI still has as its primary mission "education you can use," a phrase many A & S faculty members resent, but those involved in the project have a better understanding of the benefits when the two sides of the house are in balance.